
24 January – Third Sunday of Epiphany

Readings: Revelation 19:6-10 & John 2:1-11

Revelation 19:6-10

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

‘Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean,

was given her to wear.’

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

Then the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’

At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.’

John 2:1-11

Jesus changes water into wine

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, ‘They have no more wine.’ ‘Woman, why do you involve me?’ Jesus replied. ‘My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from eighty to a hundred and twenty litres. Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water’; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told

them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.' They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.'

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Reflection

Many years ago, my parents attended a service at my brother's school. The visiting preacher was a monk dressed in robe and sandals - this was fascinating in itself – how did he keep his feet warm in the middle of winter my mother wondered?! As well as being a charismatic speaker, he also had a talent for chemistry; or was it conjuring? As he talked about the wedding at Cana, he produced two glasses – one full of water, one apparently empty. He transferred the water from the full glass to the empty one, whereupon it promptly turned red. A lot of small boys, plus their parents, were gripped with excitement. This was more fun than the average weekly sermon! It dominated the conversation in many homes that day. I wonder if there were similar "were you there?" "do you remember?" or "how did Jesus do it?" conversations in Cana, long after the wedding celebration was over?

Weddings in the near east were huge events to which whole villages would be invited. A wedding placed certain expectations on the hosts. To run out of wine was more than an inconvenience. It was a major social gaffe and one with no immediate remedy; no dashing to the local shop! We don't know why Mary got involved. Maybe she was related to the wedding family and wanted to spare them shame. I love the indirect way she asked Jesus to help! "They have no more wine" rather than, "Please will *you* do something?!" But Jesus understood exactly what she meant! He was equally oblique in his reply. Maybe he was testing Mary to see if she truly believed he could help. She did. "Do whatever He tells you."

Their brief exchange shows Mary **trusted Jesus** to do the right thing, even though Jesus hadn't actually agreed to do anything! Mary knew she could **depend** on Jesus. What about us? When we have a need, do we turn to Jesus? Do we trust him, do we persist even when we don't get a clear answer? When we don't get an immediate answer? Or do we give up too quickly? Mary knew her son and she acted in faith that he would respond.

It is also a story about **obedience**. “Do **whatever** He tells you” said Mary. The “whatever” on this occasion was rather unexpected. Jesus asked the servants to fill the ceremonial washing jars with water. These were provided for the guests to purify themselves before the feast. The jars were enormous, holding between 20 to 30 gallons. We’re talking 120-180 gallons here! Jesus didn’t give the servants any explanation. (You could argue they were servants; that they didn’t need one). Filling the jars must have seemed strange – but what Jesus asked next was even stranger. “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” John 2:8 You can imagine the thoughts going through their heads! If Jesus wanted them to serve water, why not just tell them to take it straight to the guests? But they did not question, they simply did what Jesus asked.

How do we respond to God’s “whatevers”? Particularly when they look strange or unlikely? Is Jesus nudging you to do something which doesn’t make sense to you? Will you obey? I fear my response has sometimes been to question God’s sanity! “Do you *really* mean that? Do I *have* to do it? *Why?*” Over the years God has been remarkably gracious when I have questioned his “whatevers.” He has often given me more clues to what it is about and given me the reassurance I was looking for. But quite apart from demonstrating my abject failure on occasion, totally to trust God, how many of God’s plans for me or for others have been spoilt because I wasn’t ready to respond immediately? Sometimes timing is crucial...

When a child is about to run into the road, there isn’t time to engage in explanation. When we yell “stop” it’s vital they obey immediately. God’s command to us may be equally urgent. Moreover, God is not obliged to explain anything to us anyway. We would do well to remember that!

“You have saved the best till last!” God is good. All the time. More than good. God’s plans for us are the best. As we continue through lockdown, let us remember God cannot be stopped. Keep your eyes open for the “God-opportunities” he sends our way. Let’s be brave and step into them.

Amen

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